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## Secret Agencies: U.S. Intelligence in a Hostile World

*Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*; Thousand Oaks; Jan 1998;  
Arthur S Hulnick;

**Volume:** 555  
**Start Page:** 223-224  
**ISSN:** 00027162  
**Subject Terms:** Nonfiction  
History  
Intelligence gathering  
Political science  
Government agencies  
**Geographic Names:** United States  
US

### Abstract:

*Hulnick reviews "Secret Agencies: U.S. Intelligence in a Hostile World" by Loch K. Johnson.*

### Full Text:

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JOHNSON, LOCH K *Secret Agencies: U.S. Intelligence in a Hostile World*. Pp. xviii, 262. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996. \$29.95.

*Secret Agencies* is Loch Johnson's third book about U.S. intelligence and surely his best. His new work is not only an explanation of the inner workings of the American intelligence system but a critical assessment of it as well. As a professor of political science and a devoted student of the mysteries and foibles of American secret intelligence, Johnson brings a new dimension to this latest examination of the Central Intelligence Agency and the other members of the U.S. intelligence community.

This is not a book for the neophyte. Johnson assumes that the reader understands not only the general nature of American intelligence but also the relationship of intelligence to the national security and foreign policy arms of government. Johnson uses a rather new and clever methodology to explore the successes and failures of intelligence and the often adversarial ties between intelligence and congressional overseers. Johnson's unique perspective comes from his service on the staff of the famous Church Committee, which examined intelligence in the 1970s, and more recently as a key adviser to the bipartisan Brown Commission, studying intelligence reform.

Johnson begins his book by exploring definitions and a brief history of intelligence in the United States. He uses statistical analysis to chart the priorities that intelligence managers placed on their different missions over time and how executive branch and congressional watchdogs monitored these missions. Johnson devotes a chapter to covert action, the most controversial of intelligence activities, and sets out a "ladder of escalation" to show how policymakers might decide on the use of secret operations as threats to national security increase. He analyzes congressional oversight and shows that there were times when overseers avoided asking the tough questions-lobbing "softballs," in Johnson's terminology.

Johnson's views on **economic intelligence** occupy the latter part of his work, as does a critical assessment of American intelligence based, it appears, on his experience with the Brown Commission. Johnson derives lessons from the Cold War experience as a guide for future intelligence managers.

Secret Agencies is the kind of book scholars studying intelligence always welcome. It is a useful text for the growing number of courses in intelligence taught at universities around the country and should dispel the notion that the study of this important facet of government is not political science. Professor Johnson is both a tough critic and a fair judge of American intelligence. Secret Agencies ought to be required reading for those in government who deal with intelligence in either the executive or legislative branches as they think about reforms for the twenty-first century.

**[Author note]**

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